

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the press: a translational maze

رحلة استطلاعية في متاهة الترجمة : النزاع الإسرائيلي الفلسطيني في الصحافة المكتوبة

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Translation is present in almost every aspect of our lives. The most obvious instance of translation is book translation. Novels and technical books are often translated in a numerous number of languages and often, people don't realise that what they actually read is a translation. It might appear rather simple, such book is a translation, wonderful. End of the story. But in fact, when you come across a translation and you realise it, a door opens ajar in front of you. You will not always see it directly, but your being aware that you are actually reading a translation brings a new reflection in your mind. You make another step forward and you enter the translational maze. Let's try to follow Ariadne's thread together and find our way through the translational maze.

My doctoral thesis

- Studying the link between translation and media story-telling
- About the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (a key event in Modern History)
- Passion for languages and communication
- Discourse analysis
- Translation is a bridge between cultures, peoples and eras
- Highlight the major impact of translation in sociological and journalistic analysis

I wanted to carry on a research on a subject that would combined my passion for languages and translation with my deep interest for the Israeli-Palestinian issue. I thus decided to analyse the role of translation in the understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in newspapers.

Jerome of Stridon (347-420), patron hallow of translators, was a scholar, fluent in Greek and who knew some Hebrew. He went to Jerusalem to strengthen his mastering of Hebrew scripture. He translated the Bible from the original Hebrew, in a book known as the Vulgate (accessible to the crowd), where he revised and translated most of the Books of the Bible, and which was adopted by the 13th century by the Church.

Jerome produced a number of commentaries on Scripture, often explaining his translation choices in using the original Hebrew rather than suspect translations.

My doctoral thesis

Methodology:

- Find quotations in newspapers (with several clauses)
- Compare the occurrences of those quotations (several versions in the same language?)
- Find the translations of the quoted passages
- Read the newspaper articles where I found an occurrence
- Compare the texts and point out their similarities and differences

The predominant role of news agencies

- General basic information about news agencies

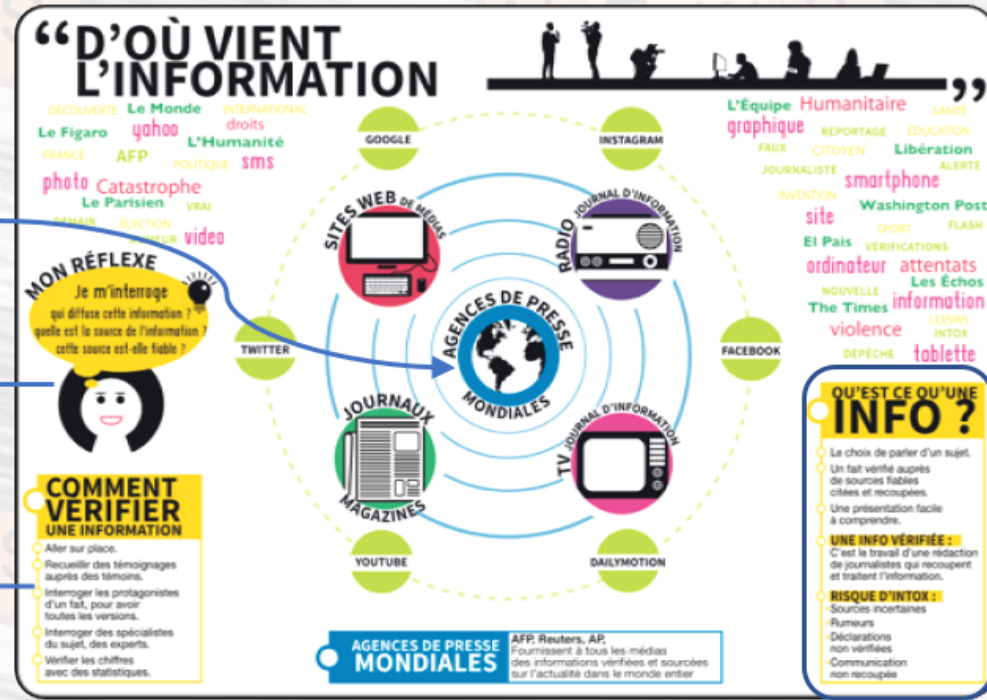
- They are at the centre of the modern information system

On this illustration, the AFP invites reader to question the information system

➔ That is what I did !

The AFP provides some details on how they check the information

Source: www.afp.com/fr/lagence/le-circuit-de-linfo



“a fact verified through reliable sources, quoted and crosschecked”

What about translation in this complex process?

- how are translations carried out?
- who is in charge of those translations?
- how reliable are they?
- how are they inserted in the whole account of a newspaper article?

We can draw an answer analysing a few examples, following the evolution of a translation.

QU'EST CE QU'UNE INFO ?

○ Le choix de parler d'un sujet.

○ Un fait vérifié auprès de sources fiables citées et recoupées.

○ Une présentation facile à comprendre.

UNE INFO VÉRIFIÉE :

C'est le travail d'une rédaction de journalistes qui recourent et traitent l'information.

RISQUE D'INTOX :

• Sources incertaines

• Rumeurs

• Déclarations non vérifiées

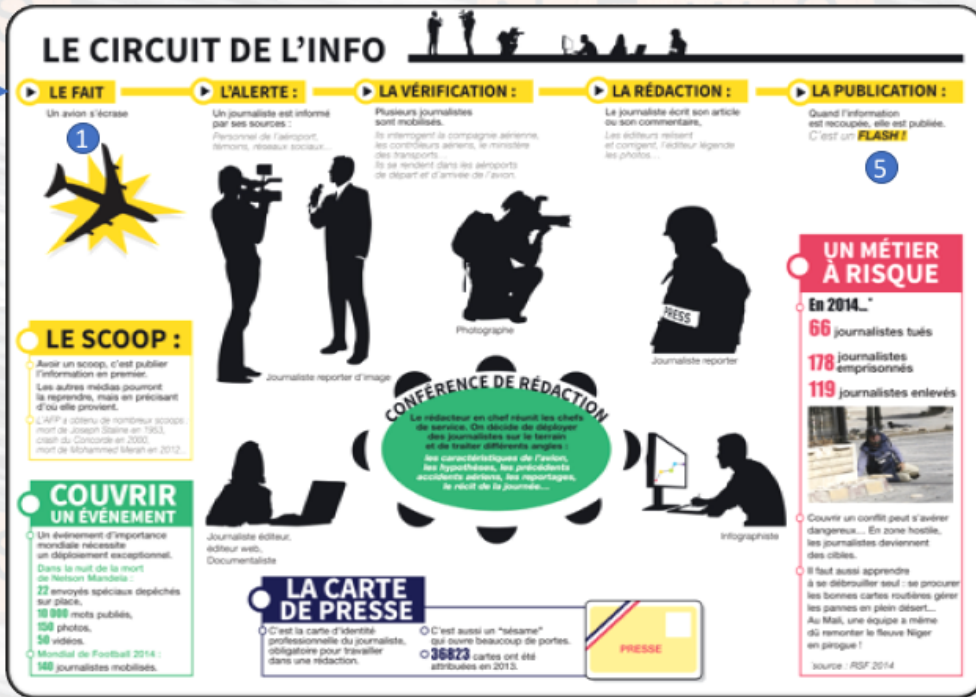
• Communication non recoupée

The information flow at a glance

Here are the different theoretical steps separating the happening of the event ① and its publication ⑤ as a “dispatch” by a news agency

Purpose of news agencies: *publish it first*

Source: www.afp.com/fr/lagence/le-circuit-de-linfo



Translation and news agencies

- Few academic researchers have already studied the translation process inside news agencies
- The main theorists of translation in the media are:
 - Susan Bassnett and Esperança Bielsa
 - Mathieu Guidère
 - Mona Baker
 - Lucile Davier (PhD in 2013)

An important thing to take into account is that news broadcasting has changed a lot after the emergence of the Internet and instant diffusion mechanisms.

What do we know about the translation process inside news agencies?

The translation process inside news agencies

- The whole reporting process from the happening of the event to its being mentioned on an agency's database has to be very quick (less than 30 minutes).

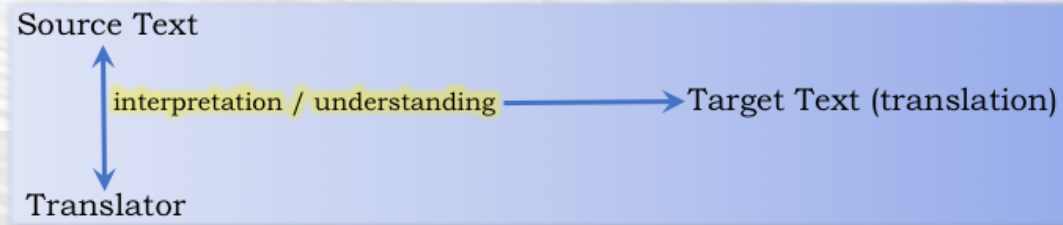


In the case of a news translator, and specifically of a translator who works in a news agency, what is characteristic is that faithfulness to the original text is subordinated to faithfulness to the narrated facts, which on some occasions and whenever there exists a clear justification allows for the introduction of alterations of meaning, which are intolerable to a translator specialized in other fields; that is to say, it obliges the translator to combine his translating task with the task of a journalistic editor.

(Bielsa, & Bassnett, 2008, 64-65)

In simple words, what could be a general definition of translation?

- As Davier explains, many were those who tried to define translation without providing an elaborated definition of the discipline.



How faithful or accurate regarding the source text are news agencies' translations?

- complex question
- depending on the working conditions

Broadly speaking, we can say that a translation is the combination of a source text (ST) subjected to the understanding and assimilation of a translator, providing as a result another text (target text)

Working conditions inside news agencies

In which atmosphere do journalists work in a news agency?

Overview based on interviews by Davier at the AFP office in Geneva

- Speed is of utmost importance
- Multilingualism (mother tongue of staff and exchanges)
- French is commonly used for intern communication (AFP)
- Dispatches are often written before the speech or any relevant text has been translated
- Journalists are expected to be “natural translators” (G. Toury)

Translation standards are not mentioned in the news agencies' guidelines

Translation in the press

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

Context:

- Nakba Day coincides with Independence Day of Israel (14th May 1948)
- 2 Palestinian teens killed by Israeli Forces in Beitunia (WB), in front of Ofer Prison during a demonstration
- They were throwing stones at soldiers and were shot
- The Israeli Ministry of Defence denied firing
- On 15th June, 3 Israeli teenagers kidnapped and their corpse were found on 30th June
- Hamas has been held responsible by Israel
- As a consequence, Israel started military operations on the Gaza Strip (airstrikes, ground operations)
- Rockets were fired from Gaza
- After several difficult negotiations, an agreement could eventually be found

regulations on the use of open-fire stipulate the only exception to the rule that live fire must not be used against stone-throwers is where an immediate mortal danger to the soldiers presents itself.

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

- In the midst of the conflict
- Made by Herman van Rompuy (President of the European Council from Jan. 2010 to Dec. 2014)

regulations on the use of open-fire stipulate the only exception to the rule that live fire must not be used against stone-throwers is where an immediate mortal danger to the soldiers presents itself.

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)



Gaza has been suffering from intolerable violence for more than three weeks already. We deplore the terrible loss of lives, including innocent women and children. Many have been injured, property and livelihoods have been destroyed. This needs to stop immediately. We strongly condemn continued rocket fire over Israel. It constitutes an unacceptable threat to its citizens. Israel has the right to live in peace in its recognised borders. Legitimate defence needs to maintain proportionality. We have all seen these cycles in the past and we know that there are limits regarding what military operations can achieve. Only a negotiated solution, based on two States, living side by side and respectful of each other, will bring lasting peace. The bloodshed needs to stop. Today we join our voice to those of the Secretary General of the United Nations and other international leaders that are calling on both sides to put an end to hostilities. We are ready to support actively negotiations, confidence building measures, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. No more lives should be wasted. Palestinian and Israeli leaders need to exercise courage by putting an end to this senseless violence. They also need to exercise courage and wisdom to move beyond these cycles of violence and advance towards arrangements that will ensure peaceful and dignified coexistence, based on mutual respect.

(Source: European Commission Statement 14/247, 3 August 2014)

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■ *Le Monde
& Al-Quds*

■ *Al-Quds
only*

(Source: European Commission Statement 14/247, 3 August 2014)

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

- 219 words, 16 short sentences
- *Le Monde*, published 86 words (8 sentences) – 39% of the whole statement
- *Al-Quds* published 188 words (12 sentences) – 86% of the whole statement
- Source language: English
- Broadcasted by the European Commission spokespersons' service
- No translation carried out by the EU Directorate-General for Translation (DGT)
- French translation carried out by the AFP ← newspapers mention *with AFP*
- The Arabic translation takes the French version as a source text

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

Gaza has been suffering from intolerable violence for more than three weeks 1 already. We deplore the terrible loss of lives, including innocent women and children.	Gaza souffre d'intolérables souffrances depuis plus de trois semaines déjà et elles ont coûté beaucoup de vies, dont celles de nombreuses femmes et enfants.	غزة تتعرض لمعاناة غير محتملة منذ أكثر من ثلاثة اسابيع اودت بحياة الكثيرين بينهم العديد من النساء والاطفال.
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N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

In the first clause of passage 1 already, something draws attention. Indeed, in English it is said that “Gaza has been suffering from intolerable *violence* [...]”, while French and Arabic respectively say *intolérables souffrances* and *معاناة غير محتملة* (both meaning intolerable suffering). This replacement of *violence* by *suffering* does not modify the core meaning of the passage but nonetheless conveys slightly different connotations. Of course, violence does evoke suffering in readers’ mind but does not necessarily mean it was caused by the use of intense force; it rather alludes to pain, as one can endure psychological suffering as a result of a situation or the living conditions, as well

as physical suffering due to an injury. Violence implies the use of a certain force or power physically, as in a fight or a physical altercation. The shift is between what the persons enduring pain feel (suffering) and what led to that pain (violence). In other words, *violence* directly evokes the bombings of the Israeli army on Gaza, while *suffering* draws attention on Gazans and what they endure in a more emotive way. Moreover, in the French and Arabic translations of passage 1, the adjective *innocent* has been removed. Yet, the fact that the bombings on Gaza made a lot of innocent victims and need to end is an important argument in Van Rompuy's rhetoric, which is a plea for peace.

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

We strongly condemn	Nous	condamns	ندين بشدة اطلاق الصواريخ
continued rocket fire over	fermement les tirs continus		المستمر على اسرائيل والذي
3 Israel. It constitutes an	de roquette contre Israël,		يهدد سكانها.
<u>unacceptable</u> threat to its	qui menacent sa		
citizens.	population.		

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

In passage 3 as well, an important word, *unacceptable*, has been removed in both French and Arabic, while the two sentences of the original English version have been merged into a single sentence with two clauses. The effect of this word is to add some strength to the sentence and balance what is said in passage 1 about the violence of the Israeli bombings on the Gaza Strip along with passage 2 (“this bloodshed needs to stop immediately”), condemning the use of weapons on both sides, in an attempt to maintain impartiality.

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

4 **Legitimate defence** needs to maintain proportionality. Nous reconnaissons le droit légitime à la défense, mais il doit être proportionné. نعترف بالحق المشروع في الدفاع عن النفس لكن يجب ان يكون متناسبا.

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

As regards passage 4, its meaning and importance is directly related to the previous passage on rocket fire from Gaza against Israel. Indeed, Israel tends to justify the use of military force as a response to rocket fire from Gaza and the Palestinian paramilitary groups in Gaza justify their firing rockets on Israel as a response to the recurrent Israeli bombing on the Strip. Moreover, what is called *legitimate defence* is almost exclusively applied to Israel and not to the Palestinians, as the latter often mention in interviews and they feel aggrieved in their right to defend themselves and their land, although it is not officially recognised as a sovereign state. If we follow this point of

view, the addition of “*nous reconnaissons le droit*”, in French and “نعترف بالحق” (both meaning *we acknowledge the right*) might be understood as reinforcing the legitimacy of Israel to defend itself. However, it would have been difficult to translate this passage without changing the sentence in this case.

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

6 Only a negotiated solution, living side by side and respectful of each other, will bring lasting peace.

Seule une solution négociée basée sur deux États respectueux l'un de l'autre peut apporter la paix.

لا شيء سوى حل تفاوضي يقوم على اساس دولتين تحترم كل منهما الاخر يمكن ان يحقق السلام .

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

In passage 6 as well, some words have been removed in the translations. And although it does not change the core meaning of the passage, they deprive it from some nuances that should have been translated to render the message of the original with greater faithfulness. Indeed, the nuances of those words are of utmost importance in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The English version insists on the fact that those two states shall be “living side by side” and that the two states solution is, according to the European Community’s point of view, the only one able to bring *lasting* peace. Those two removed parts thus insist on the interests and positive impact of this solution, which

would expect the two states to develop good diplomatic relationships and agree on their mutual frontiers. Such solution is of course not considered as appropriate by a certain number of Israeli and Palestinian politicians along with some members of the political community worldwide.

Example: Statement 14/247 of the European Commission (3rd August 2014)

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

Today we join our voice to those **of the Secretary General of the United Nations and other international leaders** that are calling on both sides to put an end to hostilities.

N/A

لذلك نضم اصواتنا الى تلك التي تدعو الطرفين الى وقف الاعمال القتالية فوراً.

N, E, W, S,

N, E, W, S,

In passage 8, the identity of some of the parties mentioned is removed and replaced by الى تلك التي تدعو (ilā talika allatī tada'ū, to those calling on), merely saying “we join our voices to those calling on both side to put an end to the hostilities”, without mentioning the Secretary General of the United Nations and other international leaders. Moreover, the Arabic translation of this passage ends by adding the word فوراً (fawran), meaning immediately, which, however it is not mentioned in English, is more than implied by the previous passages of the statement and is used in passage 2.

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(Source: European Commission Statement 14/247, 3 August 2014)

Now, if we consider the French and Arabic translations as standalone texts and compare them to the original English text, there is obviously no striking change as regards the message and the purpose of the text. In any of the three versions, this statement is still a plea for peace. However, if we have a look at what has been changed in passages 1 and 3, we can infer that the removal of the two adjectives make the passages more neutral, mentioning facts without appraisal. This interpretation is supported by the fact that in the original statement, passage 1 mentions that “innocent women and children” have lost their life and that “many have been injured, property and livelihoods have

been destroyed”, a formulation that appeals on the audience’s feelings. Another passage which has not been translated by the news agency, and it may be the most sensitive sentence in the whole statement, which suggests that the most realistic solution to reach peace between Israeli and Palestinians is the two states solution, is the sentence saying that “Israel has the right to live in peace in its recognised borders”. This short sentence, if highlighted or isolated from the rest of the statement would be powerful enough to imperil both the peace process and the European Union’s impartiality in the conflict, as it might be understood as meaning that the borders of Israel shall not be changed, as they are “recognised” and that the future Palestinian state would have to develop within the remaining space of historical Palestine without questioning the current borders of Israel. The issue of the current borders of Israel and of the borders and areas that would be part of the future Palestinian State is a great source of controversy, which might explain why this passage has not been translated. The statement ends with a long sentence calling on both parties to “move beyond these cycles of violence and advance towards arrangements that will ensure peaceful and dignified coexistence, based on mutual respect”, which, although it reminds that peace goes along with the end of violence and negotiations was not translated by the news agency.